

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUEBEC 00237 111711Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
TRSE-00 /066 W
-----090427 111720Z /40

P 111500Z JUL 78

FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1397
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY
AMCONSUL MONTREAL

C O N F I D E N T I A L QUEBEC 0237

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, CA
SUBJ: QUEBEC VOLTE-FACE ON PARTICIPATION IN FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL
CONSTITUTIONAL TALKS

REF: QUEBEC 0206

1. THE QUEBEC GOVERNMENT WILL PARTICIPATE IN FEDERAL-
PROVINCIAL CONSTITUTIONAL TALKS IN OTTAWA NEXT SEPTEMBER, INTER-
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS MINISTER CLAUDE MORIN HAS ANNOUNCED.
MORIN THUS LAID TO REST THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE GOQ WOULD BOYCOTT
THE CONFERENCE, AS RENE LEVESQUE HAD THREATENED TO DO SEVERAL
WEEKS AGO (REFTEL), BECAUSE OF WHAT HE TERMED THE "PROFOUND
INSIGNIFICANCE" OF PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU'S CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS.

2. QUEBEC HAS DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE, MORIN SAID, FOR THREE
REASONS. THE PQ GOVERNMENT:
--HAD PROMISED AT ITS FIRST FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL MEETING IN
DECEMBER 1976 TO RESPECT THE "RULES OF THE GAME" AS LONG AS THE
PRESENT GOVERNMENT WAS IN POWER IN OTTAWA;
--INTENDED TO DEFEND THE INTERESTS OF QUEBECERS NO MATTER WHAT
HAPPENS, IN THE "AUTONOMIST TRADITIONS OF NUMEROUS PREVIOUS
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT";

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--DOES NOT WISH TO BLOCK, BY ITS ABSENCE, THE PROCESS OF
CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION FOR OTHER CANADIAN PROVINCES DESIRING CHANGE
WITHIN A FEDERALIST CONTEXT.

3. COMMENT: MORIN'S EXPLANATION OF HIS GOVERNMENT'S REASONS
FOR PARTICIPATING IN FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCES IS DISIN-
GENOUS IN THE EXTREME. PRESUMABLY, PQ STRATEGISTS HAVE

COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT A BOYCOTT OF CONFERENCES ON CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IS LIKELY FURTHERTO UNDERCUT POPULAR BELIEF IN THE POSSIB OF ACHIEVING FUTURE ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION WITH THEIR CANADIAN PARTNERS. NO DOUBT, THEY HAVE ALSO COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT SUCH A BELIEF IS CRUCIAL TO THEIR CHANCES OF BUILDING THE MAJORITY NECESSARY TO WIN A MEANINGFUL REFERENDUM. MOREOVER, THEY ALSO ARE AWARE OF THE POPULARITY, AS MEASURED IN RECENT PUBLIC OPINION POLLS, OF AN OPTION INVOLVING A MODIFIED FEDERATION. PQ MAY ATTEMPT TO UNDERCUT SUPPORT FOR THIS "RENEWED FEDERALISM" OPTION BY ATTEMPTING TO DEMONSTRATE THROUGH INTRANSIGENCE AT FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCES THE DIFFICULTY IN INDUCING FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO MAKE CONCESSIONS TO SATISFY QUEBEC'S ASPIRATIONS. THERE IS PLAINLY A CONTRADICTION IN THIS STRATEGY, AND THE PQ MAY ULTIMATELY FIND THAT IT HAS SIMPLY CONVINCED QUEBEC'S VOTERS THAT THE PQ IS THE WRONG GOVERNMENT TO NEGOTIATE ANY KIND OF CHANGE WITH OTTAWA.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PROVINCE, MEETINGS, CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 11 jul 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978QUEBEC00237
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780283-1017
Format: TEL
From: QUEBEC
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780774/aaaackez.tel
Line Count: 79
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 92efce77-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 QUEBEC 206
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 13 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2050946
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: QUEBEC VOLTE-FACE ON PARTICIPATION IN FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CONSTITUTIONAL TALKS
TAGS: PGOV, CA
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/92efce77-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014